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*THE
ROCKING
HORSE*

*By
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY*

Gift of

Mrs. Max C. Sloss



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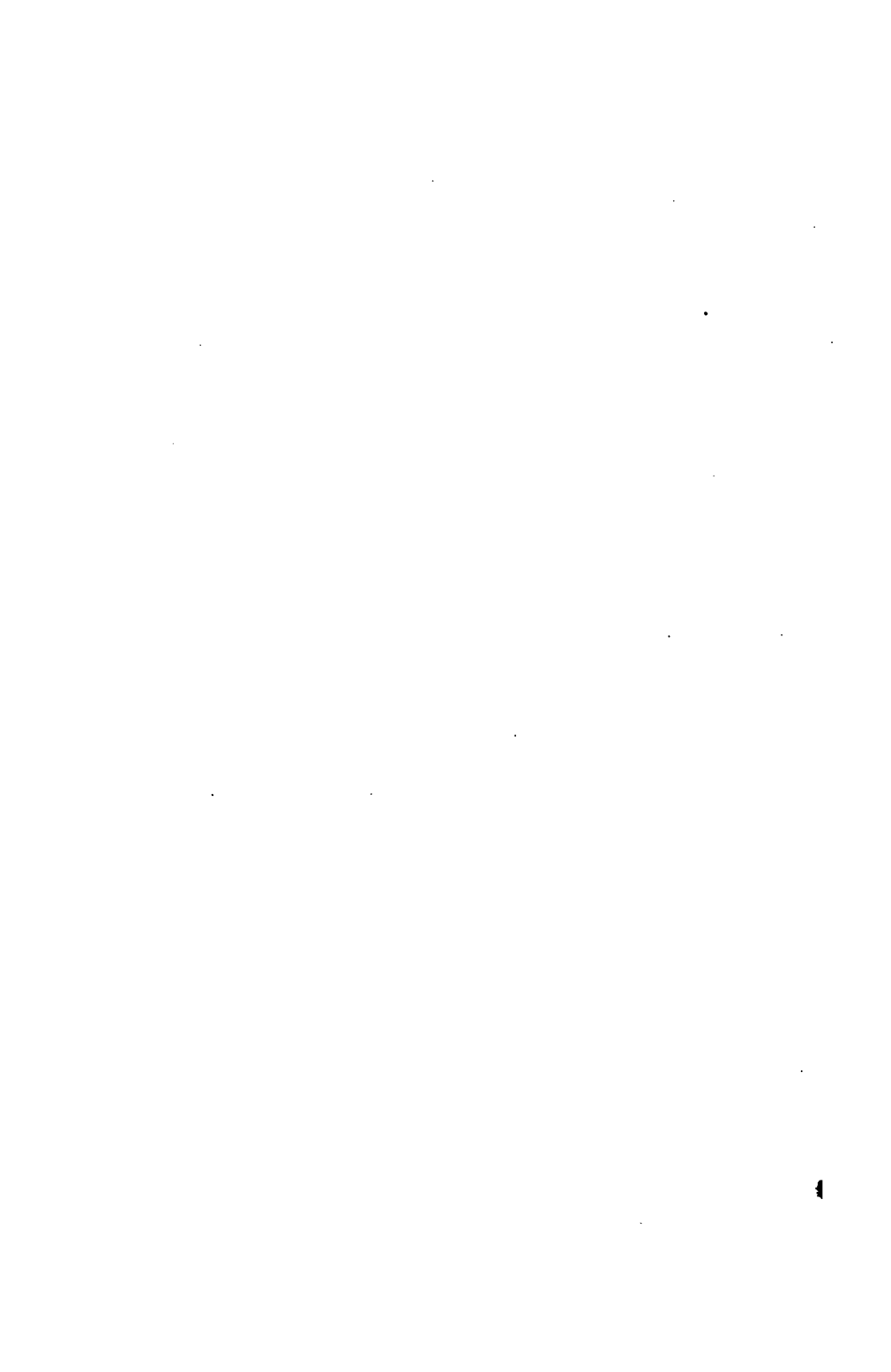


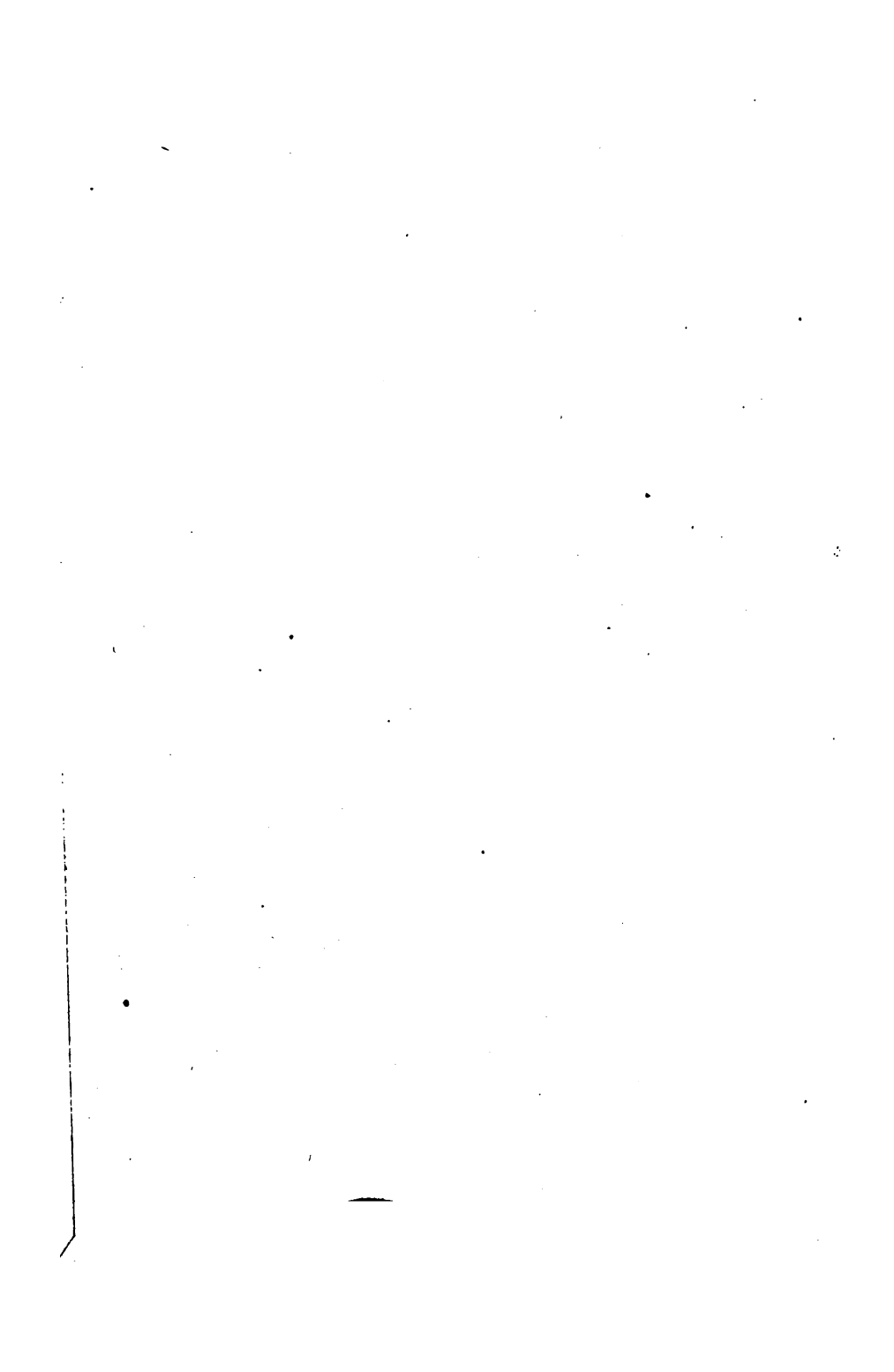
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THE ROCKING HORSE

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY



*"That wee bit heap o' leaves an' stibble
Has cost thee mony a weary nibble!"*

-ROBERT BURNS.

THE ROCKING HORSE

BY
CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

*"They swayed about upon a rocking horse,
And thought it Pegasus."*

—JOHN KEATS



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TO

TOM DALY



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C. M.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A GRACE BEFORE WRITING	xiii
IN THE CITY	
THE TRYET	17
FROM AN OFFICE WINDOW	19
THE FAT LITTLE PURSE	20
THE REFLECTION	22
TO A POST-OFFICE INKWELL	23
THE BALLOON PEDDLER	24
THE TELEPHONE DIRECTORY	25
THE ICE WAGON	27
AT A MOVIE THEATRE	30
SONNETS IN A LODGING HOUSE	32
DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE GOD?	34
THE MAN WITH THE HOE (PRESS)	36
GREEN ESCAPE	37
VEPERE SONG FOR COMMUTERS	39
AT HOME	
THE SECRET	43
DEDICATION FOR A FIREPLACE	44
ON NAMING A HOUSE	45
REFUSING YOU IMMORTALITY	46
LINES FOR AN ECCENTRIC'S BOOK-PLATE	47
THE CRIB	48
THE POET	50
TO A DISCARDED MIRROR	51
TO A VERY YOUNG GENTLEMAN	52
FOR A BIRTHDAY	54

A GRACE BEFORE WRITING

This is a sacrament, I think!
Holding the bottle toward the light,
As blue as lupin gleams the ink:
May Truth be with me as I write!

That small dark cistern may afford
Reunion with some vanished friend,—
And with this ink I have just poured
May none but honest words be penned!



IN THE CITY



THE ROCKING HORSE

THE TRYST

ACCORDING to tradition
The place where sweethearts meet
Is meadowland and hillside,
And not the city street.
Love lingers when you say it
By lake and moonlight glow:
The poets all O. K. it—
It may be better so!

And yet I keep my trysting
In the department stores:
I always wait for Emma
At the revolving doors.
It might dismay the poets,
And yet it's wholly true—
My heart leaps when I know it's
My Emma, pushing through!

It may be more romantic
By brook or waterfall,

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE TRYST—(continued)

Yet better meet on pavements
Than never meet at all:
I want no moon beguiling,
No dark and bouldered shore,
When I see Emma smiling
And twirling through the door!

IN THE CITY

FROM AN OFFICE WINDOW

(Madison Square, New York City)

WHO knows the heart's most secret aisle
Where Beauty her strange message brings?
She turns our eyes from desk and file
To gaze on new-revealèd things.

In unsuspected place and time
Her mystic profile shakes and thrills;
The humblest hear her great bells chime
Grey streets are lit with daffodils!

Who knows what sudden bliss and awe,
What comfort, and what courage new,
Some typist gained when first she saw
Diana, poised against the blue!

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE FAT LITTLE PURSE

ON Saturdays, after the baby
Is bathed, fed, and sleeping serene,
His mother, as quickly as may be,
Arranges the household routine.
She rapidly makes herself pretty
And leaves the young limb with his nurse,
Then gaily she starts for the city,
And with her the fat little purse.

She trips through the crowd at the station,
To the rendezvous spot where we meet,
And keeping her eyes from temptation,
She avoids the most windowy street!
She is off for the Weekly Adventure;
To her comrade for better and worse
She says, "Never mind, when you've spent
your
Last bit, here's the fat little purse."

Apart, in her thrifty exchequer,
She has hidden what must not be spent:
Enough for the butcher and baker,
Katie's wages, and milkman, and rent;

IN THE CITY

THE FAT LITTLE PURSE—(continued)

But the rest of her brave little treasure
She is gleeful and prompt to disburse—
What a richness of innocent pleasure
Can come from her fat little purse!

But either by giving or buying,
The little purse does not stay fat—
Perhaps it's a ragged child crying,
Perhaps it's a "pert little hat."
And the bonny brown eyes that were brightened
By pleasures so quaint and diverse,
Look up at me, wistful and frightened,
To see such a thin little purse.

The wisest of all financiering
Is that which is done by our wives:
By some little known profiteering
They add twos and twos and make fives;
And, husband, if you would be learning
The secret of thrift, it is terse:
Invest the great part of your earning
In her little, fat little purse.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE REFLECTION

I HAVE not heard her voice, nor seen her face,
Nor touched her hand;
And yet some echo of her woman's grace
I understand.

I have no picture of her loveliness,
Her smile, her tint;
But that she is both beautiful and good
I have true hint.

In all that my friend thinks and says, I see
Her mirror true;
His thought of her is gentle; she must be
All gentle too.

In all his grief or laughter, work or play,
Each mood and whim,
How brave and tender, day by common day,
She speaks through him!

Therefore I say I know her, be her face
Or dark or fair—
For when he shows his heart's most secret place
I see her there!

IN THE CITY

TO A POST-OFFICE INKWELL

HOW many humble hearts have dipped
In you, and scrawled their manuscript!
Have shared their secrets, told their cares,
Their curious and quaint affairs!

Your pool of ink, your scratchy pen,
Have moved the lives of unborn men,
And watched young people, breathing hard,
Put Heaven on a postal card.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE BALLOON PEDDLER

WHO is the man on Chestnut street
With coloured toy balloons?
I see him with his airy freight
On sunny afternoons—
A peddler of such lovely goods!
The heart leaps to behold
His mass of bubbles, red and green
And blue and pink and gold.

For sure that noble peddler man
Hath antic merchandise:
His toys that float and swim in air
Attract my eager eyes.
Perhaps he is a changeling prince
Bewitched through magic moons
To tempt us solemn busy folk
With meaningless balloons.

Beware, oh, valiant merchantman,
Tread cautious on the pave!
Lest some day come some realist,
Some haggard soul and grave,
A puritan efficientist
Who deems thy toys a sin—
He'll stalk thee madly from behind
And prick them with a pin!

IN THE CITY

THE TELEPHONE DIRECTORY

NO MALORY of old romance,
No Crusoe tale, it seems to me,
Can equal in rich circumstance
This telephone directory.

No ballad of fair ladies' eyes,
No legend of proud knights and dames,
Can fill me with such bright surmis
As this great book of numbered names!

How many hearts and lives unknown,
Rare damsels pining for a squire,
Are waiting for the telephone
To ring, and call them to the wire.

Some wait to hear a loved voice say
The news they will rejoice to know
At Rome 2637 J
Or Marathon 1450!

And some, perhaps, are stung with fear
And answer with reluctant tread:
The message they expect to hear
Means life or death or daily bread.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE TELEPHONE DIRECTORY—(continued)

A million hearts here wait our call,
All naked to our distant speech—
I wish that I could ring them all
And have some welcome news for each!

THE ICE WAGON

I'd like to split the sky that roofs us down,
Break through the crystal lid of upper air,
And tap the cool still reservoirs of heaven.
I'd empty all those unseen lakes of freshness
Down some vast funnel, through our stifled streets.

I'd like to pump away the grit, the dust,
Raw dazzle of the sun on garbage piles,
The droning troops of flies, sharp bitter smells,
And gush that bright sweet flood of unused air
Down every alley where the children gasp.

And then I'd take a fleet of ice wagons—
Big yellow creaking carts, drawn by wet horses,—
And drive them rumbling through the blazing slums.
In every wagon would be blocks of coldness,
Pale, gleaming cubes of ice, all green and silver,
With inner veins and patterns, white and frosty;
Great lumps of chill would drip and steam and
shimmer,
And spark like rainbows in their little fractures.

And where my wagons stood there would be puddles,
A wetness and a sparkle and a coolness.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE ICE WAGON—(continued)

My friends and I would chop and splinter open
The blocks of ice. Bare feet would soon come pat-
tering,

And some would wrap it up in Sunday papers,
And some would stagger home with it in baskets,
And some would be too gay for aught but sucking,
Licking, crunching those fast melting pebbles,
Gulping as they slipped down unexpected—
Laughing to perceive that secret numbness
Amid their small hot persons!

At every stop would be at least one urchin
Would take a piece to cool the sweating horses
And hold it up against their silky noses—
And they would start, and then decide they liked it.

Down all the sun-cursed byways of the town
Our wagons would be trailed by grimy tots,
Their ragged shirts half off them with excitement!
Dabbling toes and fingers in our leakage,
A lucky few up sitting with the driver,
All clambering and stretching grey-pink palms.

And by the time the wagons were all empty
Our arms and shoulders would be lame with chopping,
Our backs and thighs pain-shot, our fingers frozen.
But how we would recall those eager faces,
Red thirsty tongues with ice-chips sliding on them,

IN THE CITY

THE ICE WAGON—(continued)

The pinched white cheeks, and their pathetic glad-
ness.

Then we would know that arms were made for ach-
ing—

I wish to God that I could go to-morrow!

THE ROCKING HORSE

AT A MOVIE THEATRE

HOW well he spoke who coined the phrase
The picture palace! Aye, in sooth
A palace, where men's weary days
Are crowned with kingliness of youth.

Strange palace! Crowded, airless, dim,
When toes are trod and strained eyes smart,
We watch a wand of brightness limn
The old heroics of the heart.

Romance again hath us in thrall
And Love is sweet and always true,
'And in the darkness of the hall
Hands clasp—as they were meant to do.

Remote from peevish joys and ills
Our souls, *pro tem*, are purged and free:
We see the sun on western hills,
The crumbling tumult of the sea.

We are the blond that maidens crave,
Well balanced at a dozen banks;
By sleight of hand we haste to save
A brown-eyed life, nor stay for thanks!

IN THE CITY

AT A MOVIE THEATRE—(continued)

Alas, perhaps our instinct feels
Life is not all it might have been,
So we applaud fantastic reels
Of shadow, cast upon a screen!

THE ROCKING HORSE

SONNETS IN A LODGING HOUSE

I

EACH morn she crackles upward, tread by tread,
All apprehensive of some hideous sight:
Perhaps the Fourth Floor Back, who reads in bed,
Forgot his gas and let it burn all night—
The Sweet Young Thing who has the middle room,
She much suspects: for once some ink was spilled,
And then the plumber, in an hour of gloom,
Found all the bathroom pipes with tea-leaves filled.

No League of Nations scheme can make her gay—
She knows the rank duplicity of man;
Some folks expect clean towels every day,
They'll get away with murder if they can!
She tacks a card (alas, few roomers mind it)
Please leave the tub as you would wish to find it!

IN THE CITY

SONNETS IN A LODGING HOUSE—(continued)

II

Men lodgers are the best, the Mrs. said:
They don't use my gas jets to fry sardines,
They don't leave red-hot irons on the spread,
They're out all morning, when a body cleans.
A man ain't so secretive, never cares
What kind of private papers he leaves lay,
So I can get a line on his affairs
And dope out whether he is likely pay.
But women! Say, they surely get my bug!
They stop their keyholes up with chewing gum,
Spill grease, and hide the damage with the rug,
And fry marshmallows when their callers come.
They always are behindhand with their rents—
Take my advice and let your rooms to gents!

THE ROCKING HORSE

DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE GOD?

A CROSS the court there rises the back wall
Of the Magna Carta Apartments.
The other evening the people in the apartment opposite
Had forgotten to draw their curtains.
I could see them dining: the well-blanch'd cloth,
The silver and glass, the crystal water jug,
The meat and vegetables; and their clean pink hands
Outstretched in busy gesture.

It was pleasant to watch them, they were so human;
So gay, innocent, unconscious of scrutiny.
They were four: an elderly couple,
A young man, and a girl—with lovely shoulders
Mellow in the glow of the lamp.
They were sitting over coffee, and I could see their
hands talking.

At last the older two left the room.
The boy and girl looked at each other. . . .
Like a flash, they leaned and kissed.

Good old human race that keeps on multiplying!
A little later I went down the street to the movies,

IN THE CITY

DO YOU EVER FEEL LIKE GOD?—(continued)

And there I saw all four, laughing and joking together.

And as I watched them I felt like God—
Benevolent, all-knowing, and tender.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE MAN WITH THE HOE (PRESS)

A BOUT these roaring cylinders
Where leaping words and paper mate,
A sudden glory moves and stirs—
An inky cataract in spate!

What voice for falsehood or for truth,
What hearts attentive to be stirred—
How dimly understood, in sooth,
The power of the printed word!

These flashing webs and cogs of steel
Have shaken empires, routed kings,
Yet never turn too fast to feel
The tragedies of humble things.

O words, be strict in honesty,
Be just and simple and serene;
O rhymes, sing true, or you will be
Unworthy of this great machine!

GREEN ESCAPE

AT three o'clock in the afternoon
On a hot September day,
I began to dream of a highland stream
And a frostbit russet tree;
Of the swashing dip of a clipper ship
(White canvas wet with spray)
And the swirling green and milk-foam clean
Along her canted lee.

I heard the quick staccato click
Of the typist's pounding keys,
And I had to brood of a wind more rude
Than that by a motor fanned—
And I lay inert in a flannel shirt
To watch the rhyming seas
Deploy and fall in a silver sprawl
On a beach of sun-blached sand.

There is no desk shall tame my lust
For hills and windy skies;
My secret hope of the sea's blue slope
No clerkly task shall dull;
And though I print no echoed hint
Of adventures I devise,

THE ROCKING HORSE

GREEN ESCAPE—(continued)

My eyes still pine for the comely line
Of an outbound vessel's hull.

When I elope with an autumn day
And make my green escape,
I'll leave my pen to tamer men
Who have more docile souls;
For forest aisles and office files
Have a very different shape,
And it's hard to woo the ocean blue
In a row of pigeon holes!

VESPER SONG FOR COMMUTERS

(Instead of "Marathon," the commuter may substitute the name of his favorite suburb)

THE stars are kind to Marathon,
How low, how close, they lean!
They jostle one another
And do their best to please—
Indeed, they are so neighbourly
That in the twilight green
One reaches out to pick them
Behind the poplar trees.

The stars are kind to Marathon,
And one particular
Bright planet (which is Vesper)
Most lucid and serene,
Is waiting by the railway bridge,
The Good Commuter's Star,
The Star of Wise Men coming home
On time, at 6:15!



AT HOME





AT HOME

THE SECRET

IT was the House of Quietness
To which I came at dusk;
The garth was lit with roses
And heavy with their musk.

The tremulous tall poplar trees
Stood whispering around,
The gentle flicker of their plumes
More quiet than no sound.

And as I wondered at the door
What magic might be there,
The Lady of Sweet Silences
Came softly down the stair.

DEDICATION FOR A FIREPLACE

THIS hearth was built for thy delight,
For thee the logs were sawn,
For thee the largest chair, at night,
Is to the chimney drawn.

For thee, dear lass, the match was lit
To yield the ruddy blaze—
May Jack Frost give us joy of it
For many, many days.

ON NAMING A HOUSE

WHEN I a householder became
I had to give my house a name.

I thought I'd call it "Poplar Trees,"
Or "Widdershins" or "Velvet Bees,"
Or "Just Beneath a Star."
I thought of "House Where Plumbings
Freeze,"
Or "As You Like It," "If You Please,"
Or "Nicotine" or "Bread and Cheese,"
"Full Moon" or "Doors Ajar."

But still I sought some subtle charm,
Some rune to guard my roof from harm
And keep the devil far;
I thought of this, and I was saved!
I had my letter-heads engraved
The House Where Brown Eyes Are.

REFUSING YOU IMMORTALITY

IF I should tell, unstinted,
Your beauty and your grace,
All future lads would whisper
Traditions of your face;
If I made public tumult
Your mirth, your queenly state,
Posterity would grumble
That it was born too late.

I will not frame your beauty
In bright undying phrase,
Nor blaze it as a legend
For unborn men to praise—
For why should future lovers
Be saddened and depressed?
Deluded, let them fancy
Their own girls loveliest!

LINES FOR AN ECCENTRIC'S
BOOK PLATE

TO use my books all friends are bid:
My shelves are open for 'em;
And in each one, as Grolier did,
I write *Et Amicorum*.

All lovely things in truth belong
To him who best employs them;
The house, the picture and the song,
Are his who most enjoys them.

Perhaps this book holds precious lore,
And you may best discern it.
If you appreciate it more
Than I—why don't return it!

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE CRIB

I SOUGHT immortality
Here and there—
I sent my rockets
Into the air:
I gave my name
A hostage to ink;
I dined a critic
And bought him drink.

I spurned the weariness
Of the flesh;
Denied fatigue
And began afresh—
If men knew all,
How they would laugh!
I even planned
My epitaph. . . .

And then one night
When the dusk was thin
I heard the nursery
Rites begin:
I heard the tender
Soothings said



AT HOME

THE CRIB—(continued)

Over a crib, and
A small sweet head.

Then in a flash
It came to me
That there was my
Immortality!

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE POET

THE barren music of a word or phrase,
The futile arts of syllable and stress,
He sought. The poetry of common days
He did not guess.

The simplest, sweetest rhythms life affords—
Unselfish love, true effort truly done,
The tender themes that underlie all words—
He knew not one.

The human cadence and the subtle chime
Of little laughers, home and child and wife,
He knew not. Artist merely in his rhyme,
Not in his life.

TO A DISCARDED MIRROR

DEAR glass, before your silver pane
My lady used to tend her hair;
And yet I search your disc in vain
To find some shadow of her there.

I thought your magic, deep and bright,
Might still some dear reflection hold;
Some glint of eyes or shoulders white,
Some flash of gown as she wore of old.

Your polished round must still recall
The laughing face, the neck like snow—
Remember, on your lonely wall,
That Helen used you long ago!

THE ROCKING HORSE

FOR A BIRTHDAY

AT TWO years old the world he sees
Must seem expressly made to please!
Such new-found words and games to try,
Such sudden mirth, he knows not why,
So many curiosities!

As life about him, by degrees
Discloses all its pageantries
He watches with approval shy
At two years old.

With wonders tired he takes his ease
At dusk, upon his mother's knees:
A little laugh, a little cry,
Put toys to bed, then "seepy-bye"—
The world is made of such as these
At two years old.

SMELLS

WHY is it that the poets tell
So little of the sense of smell?
These are the odours I love well:

The smell of coffee freshly ground;
Or rich plum pudding, holly crowned;
Or onions fried and deeply browned.

The fragrance of a fummy pipe;
The smell of apples, newly ripe;
And printers' ink on leaden type.

Woods by moonlight in September
Breathe most sweet; and I remember
Many a smoky camp-fire ember.

Camphor, turpentine, and tea,
The balsam of a Christmas tree,
These are whiffs of gramarye. . . .
A ship smells best of all to me!

SMELLS (JUNIOR)

MY Daddy smells like tobacco and books,
Mother, like lavender and listerine;
Uncle John carries a whiff of cigars,
Nannie smells starchy and soapy and clean.

Shandy, my dog, has a smell of his own
(When he's been out in the rain he smells most);
But Katie, the cook, is more splendid than all—
She smells exactly like hot buttered toast!

MY FAVOURITE FLOWERS

THE yellow orchid why discuss,
When you can *eat asparagus!*
What stained-glass window could repeat
The red-veined leafage of the beet?

What delicately mottled green
Is in the humble, honest bean,
And what a balm for sin and grief
The crisp and curly lettuce leaf!

The corn, in green, translucent files,
Shimmers like cathedral aisles,
The cabbage that the frost has touched
Is like a pigeon's throat unsmutched.

An onion, if you hold your nose,
Is marvellous as any rose!

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE PLUMPUPPETS

WHEN little heads weary have gone to their
bed,
When all the good nights and the prayers have been
said,
Of all the good fairies that send bairns to rest
The little Plumpuppets are those I love best.

*If your pillow is lumpy, or hot, thin and flat,
The little Plumpuppets know just what they're at;
They plump up the pillow, all soft, cool and fat—
The little Plumpuppets plump-up it!*

The little Plumpuppets are fairies of beds:
They have nothing to do but to watch sleepy heads;
They turn down the sheets and they tuck you in
tight,
And they dance on your pillow to wish you good
night!

No matter what troubles have bothered the day,
Though your doll broke her arm or the pup ran
away;
Though your handies are black with the ink that
was spilt—
Plumpuppets are waiting in blanket and quilt.

AT HOME

THE PLUMPUPPETS—(continued)

*If your pillow is lumpy, or hot, thin and flat,
The little Plumpuppets know just what they're at;
They plump up the pillow, all soft, cool and fat—
The little Plumpuppets plump-up it!*

THE ROCKING HORSE

DANDY DANDELION

WHEN Dandy Dandelion wakes
And combs his yellow hair,
The ant his cup of dewdrop takes
And sets his bed to air;
The worm hides in a quilt of dirt
To keep the thrush away,
The beetle dons his pansy shirt—
They know that it is day!

And caterpillars haste to milk
The cowslips in the grass;
The spider, in his web of silk,
Looks out for flies that pass.
These humble people leap from bed,
They know the night is done:
When Dandy spreads his golden head
They think he is the sun!

Dear Dandy truly does not smell
As sweet as some bouquets;
No florist gathers him to sell,
He withers in a vase;
Yet in the grass he's emperor,
And lord of high renown;
And grateful little folk adore
His bright and shining crown.

THE OLD TROUSERS

WHEN Daddy comes home from the office
Then Sarah and Peter and John
Go hunt out the old pair of trousers
And beg him to hurry them on!
Those ancient remarkable garments
Are hung on the hall cupboard door;
Their use is not ended, as they are intended
For romps on the nursery floor.
The raggy old trousers, the baggy old trousers,
That romp on the nursery floor.

When Daddy lies down he's enormous-
He is such a mountainous man!
We bustle and hustle and tussle
And climb to the top if we can.
But then he rears up like a grizzly,
And tumbles us off with a roar,
And so far below him we hardly would know him,
Down there on the nursery floor,
If it weren't for the trousers, the jolly old trousers,
That romp on the nursery floor.

Dad thinks that those trousers descended
From some very old patriarch;

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE OLD TROUSERS—(continued)

He says they were carefully mended
For Noah to wear on the ark;
But though they are shabby and dusty
We love them and know what they're for;
And Mother will spare them while Daddy can wear
them
For games on the nursery floor—
The old fraying trousers, the old playing trousers,
That romp on the nursery floor!

GROWING UP

SOME day I shall be too old for a crib,
Old for a pinafore, old for a bib;
Some day—and soon, at the rate that I've grown,
I'll have a proper bed, all of my own.

Some day I'll have an allowance from Dad;
I won't be scolded because I am "bad";
Mother will let me cross streets unattended,
The holes in my stockings won't have to be mended.

Some day I'll ride in the men's smoking car,
And look at Dad's paper, and smell his cigar;
And I'll have a razor and long-trouser suit,
And then I will learn what it means to "commute."

Some day I'll eat with a fork, not a spoon;
And these manly changes can't happen too soon;
But one thing I'd like to keep up, if I might—
Have Mother to tuck in my blankets at night!

THE ROCKING HORSE

KISSING

WHEN Daddy's had his morning shave
His cheek is like a rose:
No skin could be more smooth than his
Before the stubble grows;
And when he comes out from his bath,
How I would hate to miss
The clean and sleeky fragrance of
My Daddy's morning kiss!

But when the evening hours come round,
My Daddy's cheek has grown
All rough with little prickly spikes,
With scratchy bristle sown;
While Mother's face is always soft,
And so, at night, my bliss
Is in the gentle coolness of
My Mother's bedtime kiss!

SONG FOR A LITTLE HOUSE

I'M glad our house is a little house,
Not too tall nor too wide:
I'm glad the hovering butterflies
Feel free to come inside.

Our little house is a friendly house.
It is not shy or vain;
It gossips with the talking trees,
And makes friends with the rain.

And quick leaves cast a shimmer of green
Against our whited walls,
And in the phlox, the courteous bees
Are paying duty calls.

THE ROCKING HORSE

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

NOT long ago I fell in love,
But unreturned is my affection—
The girl that I'm enamored of
Pays little heed in my direction.

I thought I knew her fairly well:
In fact, I'd had my arm around her;
And so it's hard to have to tell
How unresponsive I have found her.

For, though she is not frankly rude,
Her manners quite the wrong way rub me:
It seems to me ingratitude
To let me love her—and then snub me!

Though I'm considerate and fond,
She shows no gladness when she spies me—
She gazes off somewhere beyond
And doesn't even recognise me.

Her eyes, so candid, calm and blue,
Seem asking if I can support her
In the style appropriate to
A lady like her father's daughter.

AT HOME

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT—(continued)

Well, if I can't, then no one can—
And let me add that I intend to:
She'll never know another man
So fit for her to be a friend to.

Not love me, eh? She better had!
By Jove, I'll make her love me one day;
For, don't you see, I am her Dad,
And she'll be three weeks old on Sunday!

THE ROCKING HORSE

AT A CHILD'S BEDSIDE

IS there one who has not smiled
At the bedside of a child?
If there be one, he has missed
Earth's most tender eucharist.

Eager mind that, hour by hour,
Opened, blossomed like a flower—
To what secret honeycomb
Have those wondering thoughts gone
home?

Little hands and eyes set free
From the day's immensity,
Now relaxed and innocent
In a questionless content.

Sleep then, sleep then, little guest;
We will house thee at the best.
Tiptoe, tiptoe, on the floor—
Wake not God's ambassador!

PARADISE DEPRECATED

WHEN the faucets all stop dripping
And the bathtub never leaks;
When the house has weatherstripping
Against the blizzard weeks;
When the piping never freezes
And plumbers cease to plumb,
When every prospect pleases
And we clean by vacuum—

When wallpaper never blisters
And plaster does not fall,
When larcenous laundry sisters
Plunder us not at all;
When kitchen maids don't mutter
And tablecloths show no stain,
And husbands never utter
A single word profane—

When the rugs are never faded
And eggs go down in price;
When pantries are not raided
By children or by mice—
Then wives will never be weary,
Commuters will all grow fat:
But heavens! it would be dreary
To live in a house like that!

THE ROCKING HORSE

A HALLOWE'EN MEMORY

DO you remember, Heart's Desire,
The night when Hallowe'en first came?
The newly dedicated fire,
The hearth unsanctified by flame?

How anxiously we swept the bricks
(How tragic, were the draught not right!)
And then the blaze enwrapped the sticks
And filled the room with dancing light.

We could not speak, but only gaze,
Nor half believe what we had seen—
Our home, *our* hearth, *our* golden blaze,
Our cider mugs, *our* Hallowe'en!

And then a thought occurred to me—
We ran outside with sudden shout
And looked up at the roof, to see
Our own dear smoke come drifting out.

And of all man's felicities
The very subtlest one, say I,
Is when for the first time he sees
His hearthfire smoke against the sky.

NO ANSWER EXPECTED

WHO bade the planets veer and spin,
And loop their vast festoons?
Who tipped the earth and let her roll
Unerring grooves of air?
Who ruled the awful passages
Of suns and earths and moons,
And taught them how to pass and turn
With a billion miles to spare?

Who balanced all these flying weights
With poise and counterpoise?
Who tossed these whimsic tricks in space
Like marbles and tin cars?
And will he, weary of his play,
Fatigued by many toys,
Discard his complex trinket box
And shut its lid of stars?

THE ROCKING HORSE

AUTUMN COLOURS

THE chestnut trees turned yellow,
The oaks like sherry browned,
The fir, the stubborn fellow,
Stayed green the whole year round.

But O the bonny maple
How richly he does shine!
He glows against the sunset
Like ruddy old port wine.

THE LAST CRICKET

WHEN the bulb of the moon with white
fire fills
And dead leaves crackle under the feet,
When men roll kegs to the cider mills
And chestnuts roast on every street;

When the night sky glows like a hollow shell
Of lusted emerald and pearl,
The kilted cricket knows too well
His doom. His tiny bagpipes skirl.

Quavering under the polished stars
In stubble, thicket, and frosty copse
The cricket blows a few choked bars,
And puts away his pipe—and stops.

THE ROCKING HORSE

CHRISTMAS EVE

OUR hearts to-night are open wide,
The grudge, the grief, are laid aside:
The path and porch are swept of snow,
The doors unlatched; the hearthstones glow—
No visitor can be denied.

All tender human homes must hide
Some wistfulness beneath their pride:
Compassionate and humble grow
Our hearts to-night.

Let empty chair and cup abide!
Who knows? Some well-remembered stride
May come as once so long ago—
Then welcome, be it friend or foe!
There is no anger can divide
Our hearts to-night.

MEMORIES



MEMORIES

LUSITANIA

PROUDEST and dearest
Of ships from the Clyde,
Who has forgotten her,
And how she died?

Green slopes of Ireland
Knelt down by the foam:
To the green lap of Ireland
Our dead came home.

Warm hearts of Ireland
Brought blanket and shawl,
Straightened them, graved them,
Keened for them all.

Who has forgotten,
Or who will forget
Those pitiful graves
In a green lap set?

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE BIRTHDAY REVIEW

(May 6, 1918)

SAID the Prince, "This is my birthday:
Day for wasp-waist, sword and stars!
Let it be a feast and mirth-day—
Muster my Death's Head Hussars!"

Southward to the blue Swiss border,
North to Flemish sand-dunes pale,
Ran the Prince's birthday order,
"Skull and Crossbones, zu Befehl!"

Meanwhile, he put on his frock of
Whalebone, tinsel, gilded braids—
Garments that had borne the shock of
Many glittering parades.

Clomb the tallest of his stallions
Ready for his martial stunt;
Waiting for his proud battalions,
Playboy of the Western Front.

To the great reviewing stand he
Cantered, and his aides deployed—
Angrily the royal dandy
Gazed about him, much annoyed.

MEMORIES

THE BIRTHDAY REVIEW—(continued)

“Where are all my men?” he thundered
“Did I not give orders strict?”
Uniformed attachés wondered;
Heels of sub-lieutenants clicked.

Then, from trench and field blood-weary,
And from hamlets black with scars,
Came dead voices, thin and eerie,
Spoke the Prince’s lost Hussars:

“I am here where Verdun held us.”
“In a shattered trench I lie.”
“I, where Joffre’s legions felled us.”
“I, and I, and I, and I.”

“I am where the great guns slew us.”
“At Bapaume death set me free.”
“I, where men in blue went through us—
They no braver men than we.”

“I am here where Haig defied us.”
“I, where England stood at bay.”
“British dead are thick beside us,
We no braver men than they.”

“I, on Kemmel, where war squanders
All that honest men desire.”
“I lie here in muddy Flanders
On a trench’s clotted wire.”

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE BIRTHDAY REVIEW—(continued)

“Come, Commander, what you covet
We have bought you, flesh and soul—
This is war; and since you love it,
Join us, fill our muster-roll.”

On the broad parade ground, waiting
In his coat of braid and stars,
Stood the Crown Prince, celebrating,
Last of the Death's Head Hussars.

MEMORIES

MOONLIGHT

M OONLIGHT can never be the same,
Shadow and shine in mystic tress;
In that soft glow, with bomb and flame
They wrecked the wards of gentleness.

Borne on the evening's tender breath,
With silver-dabbled wings they came—
Tears beyond tears, death beyond death;
Moonlight can never be the same.

THE ROCKING HORSE

READING TERMINAL

A DINGY vault of noise and steam—
Vast arches and a scoop of sky;
A clang and rumble, and the stream
Of smug commuters pressing by—
A word—all heads were turned—and then:
“*A troop train waiting*”—“*Drafted men!*”

The little groups were clustered, each
To watch its men pass out of sight;
Brave lips that shook with trivial speech,
Eyes marred by secret grief all night.
“*Well, kid, I’ll wear a service pin!*”
“*Send us a postal from Berlin!*”

The boys were game. Shirt-sleeved, they smoked;
Taunted their friends—“*Your turn next draft!*”
Eyes swam. Apart, a sister choked;
Her bosom shook as though she laughed.
It was not laughter. “*Gee,*” one cries,
“*This coal-gas, honey, stings one’s eyes!*”

That is the time when teeth are set!
Those sickened hours, thank God, are few—
Thrust out from one life, but not yet
Redeemed and girded in the new.

MEMORIES

READING TERMINAL—(continued)

That is the time when naught will serve
But each man's elemental nerve.

I could not watch. Kind eyes must shut
When human hearts are bare and raw;
When all the webs of life are cut
One does not dwell on what one saw.
Yet all the passions of our race
Vibrated in that gloomy place.

A dingy vault of noise and steam—
Vast arches, and a scoop of sky;
But that great shed can never seem
The same drab place as I pass by—
I'll see that girl, alone, apart,
Choked by her leaping, naked heart.

There will be hearts for whom that place,
That crowded arch of heat and trains,
Will be a shrine for some lost face,
An altar of old joys and pains.
Ah, when you pass those gates again
Think, God be with you, drafted men.

July, 1918.

THE ROCKING HORSE

AT A NEWSPAPER BULLETIN BOARD

A MONG the crowd on Chestnut street
I saw her reading the printed sheet
That carries the lightnined bulletins
Of mankind's triumphs, griefs and sins.

Poor old lady! Her dress long-worn,
Her little black bag with a corner torn,
Her tarnished bonnet—all showed to me
No armistice with poverty.

Her eyes, with passive, sad assent,
Watched, and wondered what it meant:
The pathos of that puzzled face
Was symbol of the world's disgrace.

*Tournai is evacuated—
Kaiser may have abdicated—
Fifteen thousand Austrians taken—
Enemy's morale is shaken—*

*Reichstag sitting rent in faction—
U. S. men in heavy action—
Belgian villages defiled—
Casualty list compiled—*

MEMORIES

AT A NEWSPAPER BULLETIN BOARD—(continued)

All these she read, with mind inert,
For those whom life has greatly hurt
Seek not to struggle nor explain:
They have learnt dumbness under pain.

The letters on the printed roll
Moved on. She stood, with patient soul:
The Allies land more men in Greece—
Predictions of an early peace—

I saw the tremble of work-warped hand:
There was news she could understand!
O men, do justice, nor disgrace
The hopefulness of that poor face!

October, 1918.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE ENGINEER

THE seven steel-ribbed coaches
Draw smoothly to the shed,
And you and other passengers
Now hurry home to bed;
You've done your easy hundred miles
In ninety minutes clear—
Then thank the man who brought you,
The old grey engineer.

Your hope, your love, your children,
The prayers that you have prayed,
Lie in his faithful fingers
On trestle, curve and grade;
By crossing, draw and culvert
His leaping engine roars,
'And clear as altar lamps he sees
The green-lit semaphores.

Unthanked and unremembered,
He holds your life secure;
His service does not falter,
His hand and eye are sure;
A thousand tons go flashing
Along that ribbon slim;
The roar of his tall driving wheels
Is very like a hymn.

MEMORIES

THE ENGINEER—(continued)

His miracle of power
Is terrible and swift;
Farewells and lovers' meetings
Are equally his gift;
In starlight or in snowstorm,
A priest of creed austere,
He brings you home in safety—
The old grey engineer.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE ISLAND

*A SONG for England?
Nay, what is a song for England?*

Our hearts go by green-cliffed Kinsale
Among the gulls' white wings,
Or where, on Kentish forelands pale
The lighthouse beacon swings:
Our hearts go up the Mersey's tide,
Come in on Suffolk foam—
The blood that will not be denied
Moves fast, and calls us home!

Our hearts now walk a secret round
On many a Cotswold hill,
For we are mixed of island ground,
The island draws us still:
Our hearts may pace a windy turn
Where Sussex downs are high,
Or watch the lights of London burn,
A bonfire in the sky!

What is the virtue of that soil
That flings her strength so wide?
Her ancient courage, patient toil,
Her stubborn wordless pride?

MEMORIES

THE ISLAND—(continued)

A little land, yet loved therein
As any land may be,
Rejoicing in her discipline,
The salt stress of the sea.

Our hearts shall walk a Sherwood track,
Our lips taste English rain,
We thrill to see the Union Jack
Across some deep-sea lane;
Though all the world be of rich cost
And marvellous with worth,
Yet if that island ground were lost
How empty were the earth!

A song for England?
Lo, every word we speak's a song for England.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE TREES

THE poplar is a French tree,
A tall and laughing wench tree,
A slender tree, a tender tree,
That whispers to the rain—
An easy, breezy flapper tree,
A lithe and blithe and dapper tree,
A girl of trees, a pearl of trees,
Beside the shallow Aisne.

The oak is a British tree,
And not at all a skittish tree:
A rough tree, a tough tree,
A knotty tree to bruise;
A drives-his-roots-in-deep tree,
A what-I-find-I-keep tree,
A mighty tree, a Blighty tree,
A tree of stubborn thews.

The pine tree is our own tree,
A grown tree, a cone tree,
The tree to face a bitter wind,
The tree for mast and spar—
A mountain tree, a fine tree,
A fragrant turpentine tree,
A limber tree, a timber tree,
And resinous with tar!

MEMORIES

THE TRUCE

WHY do men speak with bated breath
Of this strange truce that they call Death?
Death is not Life's antithesis,
It may be but an armistice.
What is Death's analogue on earth?
It is not Life, but rather Birth.
Men fear not to be born; then why
Should they be so alarmed to die?



RUBBER HEELS



RUBBER HEELS

REQUIEM, ON DISCARDING AN OLD SUIT

FAREWELL, a long farewell, to my old breeches!
Farewell, sweet shabby coat and soup-stained
vest!

Farewell, dear trousers, patched with careful
stitches!

The good old suit, my wife says, has "gone West."

These trousers which (my dear) you say disgraced
me—

Which "furnace men would be too proud to
wear"—

For twelve long months they lovingly embraced me.
When shall I see again so fine a pair?

They were the colour of tobacco ashes
(A pipe could never harm such pantaloons),
And they were camouflaged with stains and splashes,
Fond souvenir of feats with forks and spoons.

THE ROCKING HORSE

REQUIEM, ON DISCARDING AN OLD SUIT—
(continued)

I knew by heart which pockets could be trusted,
And which let small change vanish through a hole;
Though ragged, baggy, wrinkled, mud-encrusted,
If ever breeks do, those breeks had a soul!

And now, dolled up in crass new coat and trousers,
Ashamed and sad, I pace the lonely street,
Unhappy in my finery, for now, sirs,
My friends will never know me when we meet!

RUBBER HEELS

THE NIGHT BEFORE PAYDAY

'**T**WAS the night before payday, and all through
my jeans
I hunted in vain for the price of some beans.
Not a quarter was stirring, not even a jit;
The kale was off duty, milled edges had quit.
Forward, turn forward, O Time, in thy flight—
Make it to-morrow, just for to-night!

THE ROCKING HORSE

AN ECSTATIC TRIBUTE

SHE does not whistle, shout or hum,
And watch the clock all afternoon;
She does not chew incessant gum,
She does her job, and does it soon.

She keeps the calendar correct,
She does not tangle up the files;
She gives the boss no disrespect,
Nor plays tag in the stockroom aisles.

She does not wear ink on her face,
She is no fount of endless noise:
Our office is a different place—
Try office girls instead of boys!

EPITAPH ON THE PROOFREADER OF THE
ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA

MAJESTIC tomes, you are the tomb
Of Aristides Edward Bloom,
Who laboured, from the world aloof.
In reading every page of proof.

From A to And, from Aus to Bis
Enthusiasm still was his;
From Cal to Cha, from Cha to Con
His soft-lead pencil still went on.

But reaching volume Fra to Gib,
He knew at length that he was sib
To Satan; and he sold his soul
To reach the section Pay to Pol.

Then Pol to Ree, and Shu to Sub
He staggered on, and sought a pub.
And just completing Vet to Zym,
The motor hearse came round for him.

He perished, obstinately brave:
They laid the Index on his grave.

THE ROCKING HORSE

JOHN J. HARRISON

JOHN J. HARRISON—peace to his head!—
Had one passion, and that was bed.
Truly he counted the day ill-spent
Unless by nine to the hay he went.

My, how he loved, on a winter's night,
To turn down the coverlet, tuck up tight,
And lie, like the beautiful girl in Keats,
A little bit goose-fleshed, between cold sheets.

Buried by blanket and padded quilt,
Many a castle in Spain he built;
Nestled and snuggled and spread his toes,
And just evaporated into repose.

John J. Harrison wisely deemed
That sleep can never be overesteemed,
And a twelve-hour night, on good wire springs,
Is something rare in the lives of kings.

The passion that most men bestow
On golf or cards or tit-tat-toe,
On the other sex, or baseball scores,
J. J. H. put in on snores.

RUBBER HEELS

JOHN J. HARRISON—(continued)

Oh! that man made sleep a career;
He would lie and pound his ear
Eighty Ostermoor hours a week—
What do you think of that technique?

I, as his roommate, had often chidden
Him for being so bedridden:
It looked to me like a certain sign
Of horizontality of the spine!

John's sleepmeter would mew and buzz,
But never could lure him out of the fuzz.
At eight o'clock, when to work I went,
John would register great content.

"Sleep," he said, "appeals to me,
So I take it seriously:
I could slumber forever, old pup—
Sleep and sleep, and *never* wake up."

He was a man I so admired
That I helped him to what he desired:
What he wanted was what he got—
I put a rattlesnake in his cot.

THE ROCKING HORSE

BALLADE OF DROWSINESS

I HEARD a young efficiency expert
Remark, "A man should never sleep by day."
When I heard this I felt a trifle hurt:
A nap *does* help to pass the time away!
Upon the filing case my head I lay,
Massage my soul with slumber long and deep—
I must have been compact of drowsy clay.
For nothing rests me quite as much as sleep.

The boss has sometimes made a comment curt,
And says he will abbreviate my pay,
Then I have tried to make a valiant spurt
And keep the dear old Lethargy at bay.
No use! My mind is heavy as a dray,
I never need to count a row of sheep.
Upon my rolltop desk I hit the hay,
For nothing rests me quite as much as sleep.

Stenographers have waited, all alert,
To hear what grave dictation I might say—
Then suddenly my form becomes inert
And I collapse (to their intense dismay).
Though I have drunk black coffee by the tray
My vital tide won't rise above the neap.
Upon my spine my head begins to sway—
For nothing rests me quite as much as sleep.

RUBBER HEELS

BALLADE OF DROWSINESS—(continued)

ENVOY

No pillow, I with confidence assert,
Can beat three phone books piled up in a heap.
Siestas should be public and overt,
For nothing rests me quite as much as sleep.

THE ROCKING HORSE

THANKSGIVING FOR HAVING OVERSLEPT

TO-DAY, my friends, I overslept
And woke at half-past eight;
I reached the office where I'm kept
About two hours late.

I worked all morning breakfastless,
Made my digestion grieve;
The boss, unless I miss my guess,
Has thunder up his sleeve.

But I'm glad I was indolent!
The memory still glows—
Life cannot steal that increment
Of sweet unearned repose!

What though the time-clock will deduct
Two hours? it will be cheap—
The whole damned universe I bucked
And got a raise of sleep!

RUBBER HEELS

BALLADE OF GETTING ONE'S FEET WET

I OFTEN thought, when I was small,
How most delightful it would be
To go out walking in a squall
And tramp in puddles for a spree;
But if I did so, brief the glee—
I knew the old familiar threat:
“You’ll have to change *immediately*—
Good gracious me, your feet are wet!”

They used to catch me in the hall
And then and there examine me—
Investigation to appal
The bravest boy, you will agree!
And if, between my shoe and knee
The slightest patch of damp was met,
Though I called Dad for referee,
“Good gracious me, your feet are wet!”

Of no avail to bluster, bawl,
Or to attempt some specious plea,
But I would think (I now recall)
“When I’m grown up I will be free”—
Alas for human fallacy!
The old dominion sways me yet:
On rainy days my wife, says she,
“Good gracious me, your feet are wet!”

THE ROCKING HORSE

BALLADE OF GETTING ONE'S FEET WET—
(continued)

ENVOY

This is the thing men may not flee,
The thing no womenfolk forget—
Some day my grandchild will decree
“Good gracious me, your feet are wet!”

LINES ON THE CONSECRATION OF A NEW
SMOKING CAR

L OVELY brand-new smoking car.
Sacred to the rich cigar,
Carry, safely and with speed,
Happy lovers of the weed!

Varnished, shining, fresh and clean,
Caravan of nicotine,
Lo, we wish thee long career,
Rolling stock without a peer!

Welcome to suburban traffic!
Smokers all rejoice seraphic;
And the many who commute
May sit down with their cheroot.

Lo, how fervent is our praise
If thy windows we can raise!

THE ROCKING HORSE

THE ORPHAN POEM

A POET said, "I'll write a song that every one
will sing,
A verse with just the human note that carries fast
and far—
I shall be known forever as the man who wrote that
thing;
The papers will reprint it from here to Zanzibar!"

He wrote the piece, "Those Old Blue Jeans." It
made a ready hit,
And in the mazes of the press the song began to
range;
But some one's hasty scissors snipped the author's
name from it,
And everywhere he saw it, it was credited
"Exchange."

'Anthologies, the rural press and patent almanacs
Reprinted it; and humourists revamped it for
their turns;
He found it in his clippings, which were piling up
in stacks,
Attributed to Riley, Eugene Field and Robby
Burns.

RUBBER HEELS

THE ORPHAN POEM—(continued)

He tried to catch the orphan: he sought in his
distress

To salt its tail and make the poem wear the name
it ought;

The derelict kept wandering on the ocean of the
press—

If he nailed it down in Portland, it popped up in
Terre Haute!

He wrote to all the editors of all the magazines

Until they wished the wretched man were laid
beneath the ferns;

And when he called they'd lock the door and say
"Here's Old Blue Jeans:

The idiot who thinks he wrote that piece by Robby
Burns!"

The moral of the ditty is just this, my poet friends—
When you write those homely poems, put your name
on at both ends!

THE ROCKING HORSE

GRACE BEFORE HOT WEATHER

(To the Weather Man)

FOR what we surely shall receive,
For sultry heat and lightning prankful,
For storms you may have up your sleeve,
We pray thee, Boss, to make us thankful.

July and August come apace,
The burning days that vex us greatly:
The sky will show no April face
Such as our hearts rejoiced in lately.

But though we stew with beaded brow,
And crave the self-destroying pistol,
We shall (we hope) remember how
You gave us days so cool and crystal.

Whate'er you send to wilt and grieve—
Humidity and heat together—
We thank thee, Boss, for this reprieve,
This spell of mild and joyous weather!

RUBBER HEELS

KITH AND KIN

THE Lipping Lovers, nice young things,
Are walking arm in arm;
But chaperones who hear them talk
Show no signs of alarm.

Their words are all of relatives
And wholly without sin:
When he says, "May I have a kith?"
She answers, "Sure, you kin."

THE ROCKING HORSE

TEN LITTLE COCKTAILS

ONE little cocktail between me and you—
You said: "Another one?" Then there were
two.

Two little cocktails, jolly as could be:
Along came Freddy, and then there were three.

Three little cocktails—"I never take more."
But Freddy insisted, and then there were four.

My head began to spin and buzz like a hive,
But no one would weaken, and so there were five.

Five little cocktails, guaranteed to mix—
"Let's try a Clover Club"—and then there were six.

Six little cocktails feel just like heaven.
"One more to sober up"—and that made seven.

Seven little cocktails—it must be getting late.
"This one's on me, Bill"—and then there were eight.

Eight little cocktails dancing down your spine . . .
"Bad luck to quit now," and so there were nine.

Nine little cocktails soon become ten—
!!...???((\$\$\$&fff))---!!

Ring for the ambulance—**Never Again!**

WHEN SHAKESPEARE LAUGHED

WHEN Shakespeare laughed, the
fun began!
Even the tavern barmaids ran
To choke in secret, and unbent
A lace, to ease their merriment.
The *Mermaid* rocked to hear the man.

Then Ben his aching girth would span,
And roar above his pasty pan,
"Avast there, Will, for I am spent!"
When Shakespeare laughed.

I' faith, let him be grave who can
When Falstaff, Puck and Caliban
In one explosive jest are blent.
The boatmen on the river lent
An ear to hear the mirthful clan
When Shakespeare laughed.

THE ROCKING HORSE

TO LUATH

(Robert Burns's Dog)

"Darling Jean" was Jean Armour, a "comely country lass," whom Burns met at a penny wedding at Mauchline. They chanced to be dancing in the same quadrille when the poet's dog sprang to his master and almost upset some of the dancers. Burns remarked that he wished he could get any of the lasses to like him as well as his dog did.

Some days afterward, Jean, seeing him pass as she was bleaching clothes on the village green, called to him and asked him if he had yet got any of the lasses to like him as well as his dog did.

That was the beginning of an acquaintance that coloured all of Burns's life.—NATHAN HASKELL DOLE.

WELL, Luath, man, when you came prancing
All glee to see your Robin dancing,
His partner's muslin gown mischancing
You leaped for joy!
And little guessed what sweet romancing
You caused, my boy!
With happy bark, that moment jolly,
You frisked and frolicked, faithful collie;
His other dog, old melancholy,
Was put to flight—

RUBBER HEELS

TO LUATH—(continued)

But what a tale of grief and folly
You wagged that night!

Ah, Luath, tyke, your bonny master
Whose lyric pulse beat ever faster
Each time he saw a lass and passed her
His breast went bang!
In many a woful heart's disaster
He felt the pang!

Poor Robin's heart, forever burning,
Forever roving, ranting, yearning,
From you that heart might have been learning
To be less fickle!
Might have been spared so many a turning
And grievous prickle!

Your collie heart held but one notion—
When Robbie jigged in sprightly motion
You ran to show your own devotion
And gambolled too,
And so that tempest on love's ocean
Was due to you!

Well, it is ower late for preaching
And hearts are aye too hot for teaching!
When Robin with his eye beseeching
By greenside came,
Jeanie—poor lass—forgot her bleaching
And yours the blame!

THE ROCKING HORSE

BALLADE OF AN AMBROSIAL EVENING

I KNOW a pub where I can chow at dusk
On lentil soup, grilled kidneys and white wine;
Take coffee in the garden, with a rusk,
And smoke black leaf tobacco while I dine—
Can drink liqueurs until my seasoned spine
Begins to tingle and my brain to whirr:
Then bring a candle, landlord, just at nine,
And have the sheets perfumed with lavender!

Pour me a claret (Medoc, sweet as musk!)
Carve me a juicy cut along the chine,
Then watch me ply a not unwilling tusk
And quaff the western sun down his decline.
Perhaps some olives, seasoned well in brine,
Our pot of shandygaff, if you prefer;
But, landlord, to complete the fair design,
Pray have the sheets perfumed with lavender!

No heavy vintage: nothing strong or brusque,—
The smooth and mellow essence of the vine—
Perhaps some green corn, roasted in the husk,
And omelette singed with brandy—O benign!
Allegro ma non troppo is my line:
The graceful mean where all the arts concur
To make one long ambrosial evening mine,
And then—O sheets perfumed with lavender!
—116—

RUBBER HEELS

BALLADE OF AN AMBROSIAL EVENING—(continued)

ENVOY

O best of landlords! Let your light so shine
That many another thirsty wanderer
May (after dinner) all his cares resign
And find your sheets perfumed with lavender!

THE ROCKING HORSE

THOUGHTS ON REACHING LAND

I HAD a friend whose path was pain—
Oppressed by all the cares of earth
Life gave him little chance to drain
His secret cisterns of rich mirth.

His work was hasty, harassed, vexed:
His dreams were laid aside, perforce,
Until—in this world, or the next. . . .
(His trade? Newspaper man, of course!)

What funded wealth of tenderness,
What ingots of the heart and mind
He must uneasily repress
Beneath the rasping daily grind.

But now and then, and with my aid,
For fear his soul be wholly lost,
His devoir to the grape he paid
To call soul back, at any cost!

Then, liberate from discipline,
Undrugged by caution and control,
Through all his veins came flooding in
The virtued passion of his soul!

RUBBER HEELS

THOUGHTS ON REACHING LAND—(continued)

His spirit bared, and felt no shame:

With holy light his eyes would shine—
See Truth her acolyte reclaim

After the second glass of wine!

The self that life had trodden hard

Aspired, was generous and free:
The glowing heart that care had charred
Grew flame, as it was meant to be.

A pox upon the canting lot

Who call the glass the Devil's shape—
A greater pox where'er some sot
Defiles the honour of the grape.

Then look with reverence on wine

That kindles human brains uncouth—
There must be something part divine
In aught that brings us nearer Truth!

So—continently skull your fumes

(Here let our little sermon end)
And bless this X-ray that illumines
The secret bosom of your friend!

THE ROCKING HORSE

A SYMPOSIUM

THERE was a Russian novelist
Whose name was Solugubrious,
The reading circles took him up,
(They'd heard he was salubrious.)

The women's club of Cripple Creek
Soon held a kind of seminar
To learn just what his message was—
You know what bookworms women are.

The tea went round. After five cups
(You should have seen them bury tea)
Dear Mrs. Brown said what she liked
Was the great man's *sincerity*.

Sweet Mrs. Jones (how free she was
From all besetting vanity)
Declared that she loved even more
His broad and deep *humanity*.

Good Mrs. Smith, though she disclaimed
All thought of being critical,
Protested that she found his work
A wee bit *analytical*.

RUBBER HEELS

A SYMPOSIUM—(continued)

But Mrs. Black, the President,
Of wisdom found the pinnacle:
She said, "Dear me, I always think
Those Russians are so *cynical*."

Well, poor old Solugubrious,
It's true that they had heard of him;
But neither Brown, Jones, Smith, nor Black
Had ever read a word of him!

THE ROCKING HORSE

A BASEMENT LOVE SONG

O LOVE of mine, some months ago
(Emotion my speech hinders)
Our passion lost its ruddy glow
And flickered out in cinders.

And yet, old dear, that winter through
(Before our paths divided)
Did any other care for you
As ardently as I did?

But now resumes love's festival,
Rekindling ancient embers—
And all the former fever shall
Revivify your members.

Again I'll woo you, and will deem
You worthy of your wages,
And, as a gauge of my esteem,
Keep steam up in your gauges.

When bitter blasts howl wintrily
I'll hug you close. My love'll
Be large with chestnut, egg and pea,
And buss you with a shovel!

A HYMN OF HATE FOR
HAY FEVER

OF all things that exasperate
And drive us on to dice and liquor;
Of all the ills that rouse our hate
And make us pray that death come quicker—
Of all the plagues that harass earth
And bid us hasten to bereave her,
There is no pang since Adam's birth
Quite so degrading as hay fever.

Amid abominable throes,
Contortions utterly displeasing,
And racked by these incessant blows
And jets and trumpeting of sneezing;
Throughout the prickling, roaring fits,
The agonies past all abating,
We echo still that gifted Fritz
Who taught the world the art of hating:

*We sneeze as one and we groan as one,
We hate one thing and one alone,—*

HAY FEVER!

THE ROCKING HORSE

A FREUDIAN LULLABY

LULLABY, my precious child,
Psychoanalyse your mind!
Wakeful though you are, and wild,
Let us see if you can find
Motives that you have repressed
Which might interrupt your rest?

Have you unfulfilled desires
In your mystic little head?
Dreams of toys with rubber tirt
That must be interpreted?
Lullaby and tranquil keep—
I impose the will-to-sleep.

Lullaby and close your eyes,
For your nap must be enjoyed:
I will psychoanalyse
In the mode of Mr. Freud—
In unconsciousness immersed,
Maybe I shall slumber first!

SYNTHETIC POEMS

Revery

I ALWAYS intended to be
A stern silent man
With a level, piercing gaze—
A man before whom
Even the bartender would quail.
But somehow I am a little late
In getting started.

Warning

I have said it before:
I shall say it again:
Look out for the theories,
For the facts
Can take care of themselves.

Uneasiness

Sometimes when I am writing poetry
I have an uncomfortable feeling
That I am about to be
Interrupted
By a flash of prose.

THE ROCKING HORSE

SYNTHETIC POEMS—(continued)

Pessimism

I always ask
At least three trainmen
If this is the right train for where I am going.
Even then,
I hardly believe them.

What, Indeed?

'A girl with brown eyes
Said to n
"What's the Big Idea?"
And to tell you the truth
I hardly know.

Call for Volunteers

The Truth is greatly improved
By not being uttered.
Assist in this great work!

Lack of Balance

The Prune Exchange Bank
Refused my account
Because I tried to deposit
A dew-spangled cobweb
And a post-dated sunset.

ABDICATION

THERE are too many poets: competition
Is hot and heavy in the rhyming trade,
And (to be frank) I have a dark suspicion
That after all the work is underpaid.
And I have always yearned to be a grocer
And sell the freshest eggs were ever henned
Or say to fretful customers, Oh no, sir,
That brand we do not care to recommend!

So I shall sell my rhyming dictionary,
And in some little neat suburban block
Between a Chinese laundry and a dairy
I'll buy a store and there display my stock.
The window will be full of jams and cocoa,
And there will be a glass case of cigars,
And canisters of spice from Orinoco,
Prunes, gingerbread, and Castile soap in bars.

Forgetful of my literary vices,
I'll revel in my barrels, tins, and kegs;
If editors should come, I'll raise my prices
And sell them uncertificated eggs.
But comes the noble critic who, reviewing
My verses, was so generous to me,
Whate'er he asks—yea, sugar, citron, bluing,
Tea, tripe or olives—*he shall have it free!*

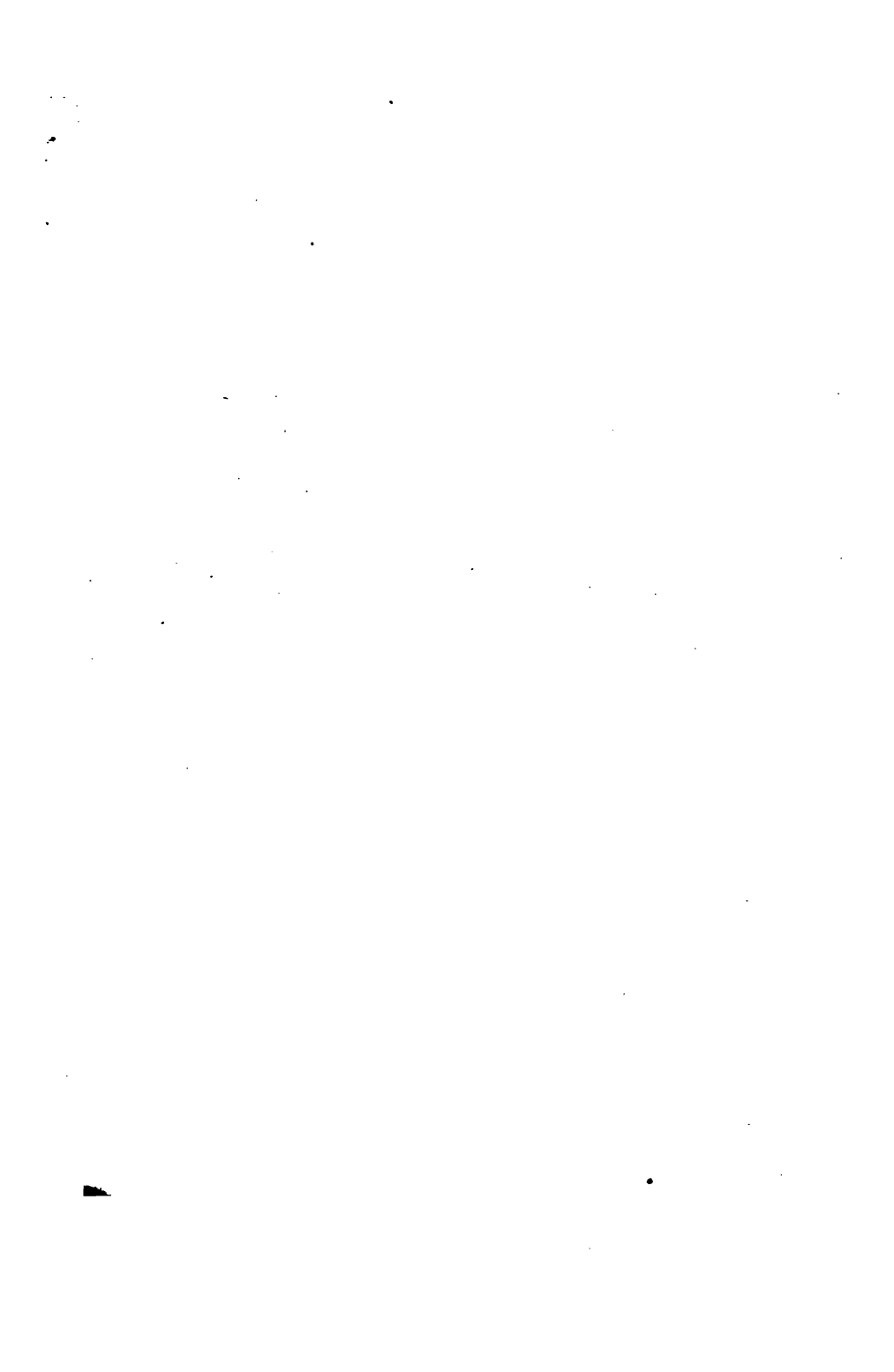
THE ROCKING HORSE

STANZAS WRITTEN IN DEJECTION

WHEN I read the poems of greater bards,
Their music, grace and wit,
Their deeply blended sound and sense,
The melody they have writ,
Then I am smitten with sharp chagrin
And envy chills my ink:
Why can't I think the beautiful thoughts
The other poets think?
Why is my Muse so weak of wing,
My bag of rhymes so light?
Why can't I write the thundering stuff
The other poets write?

THE END







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